

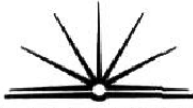
The role of the historian has been debated, and is still being debated in a contemporary setting. Munslow succinctly provides an overview of the ~~historical~~ debate between historical modernists and post-modernists. Through ~~analysis~~ the ~~positions~~ positions of examination of modernist historians Mark Trachtenberg, and Keith Windschuttle and post-modernist historian John Vincent, one can observe the debate occurring in modern times (1990 and beyond), and perhaps even arrive at a conclusion about the validity of said positions.

Mark Trachtenberg, ~~is~~ is a proponent of a modernist approach to history. He remarks that when he first became involved in history, "the goal was to get at the truth" - "the truth" being <sup>the</sup> a modernist expression of the notion that what happened 'happened' and that cannot be changed. He dismisses the notion of applying

a subjective approach to history; "if objectivity is a myth, how can our understanding of the past be <sup>anything</sup> more than an artefact of our political beliefs?" Furthermore, Trachtenberg criticises the way in which subjectivity may introduce multiple views of history before ultimately 'settling' on one, notably less holistic view of history, stating that "the 'privileging' of certain kinds of history necessarily implies the marginalisation of others" (he implies the 'privileged' histories have a ~~mostly~~ decidedly liberal tone). ~~The~~ Trachtenberg doesn't make criticisms ~~of~~ post-modernism in history based in ~~the~~ validity of approach. Rather, he makes criticisms based on the usefulness of results, implying that post-modern history has no use as it does not tell 'the' one 'truth'.

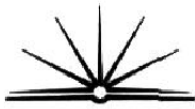
John Vincent answers the questions that Trachtenberg seems to deliberately and fearfully avoid. He explicitly notes how history has

always been influenced by context; "[H]istory is deeply male [...] essentially run - young [...] [and] about the rich and famous". Vincent asserts that "History is about evidence, and evidence flagrantly distorts". He does not believe that evidence points to a clear narrative of the past, rather, he explains that even before a historian examines the evidence, there ~~is~~ bias in the "survival of evidence", implying both that evidence may have been deliberately altered in the past in consideration of its use in the future, and that ~~the evidence that has survived~~ there is no way to determine that the evidence that has survived by chance is an accurate depiction of the past. John Vincent essentially asserts that bias is inherent in history, and that it should not be ~~suppressed~~ suppressed, rather, ~~the various interpretations~~ the various interpretations should be recognised as merely interpretations,



and "our culture" should its "bias against bias".

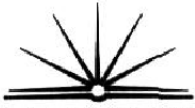
Keith Windschuttle (more explicitly than Trachtenberg) denounces the views that Vincent represents, adhering to a strictly modernist view of history. Windschuttle likens historians to "scientific practitioners" who base their findings on "empirical evidence". He acknowledges that historians may have political biases, but asserts that it is their duty to recognise them and compensate for them so as to produce work with point-of-view as neutral as possible. Windschuttle attempts to debunk Vincent's claims of bias in "survival of evidence" by quoting G.R. Elton: "that which is left behind deliberately for observers is a drop in the bucket compared with what is left behind by action without thought for its consequence". Windschuttle believes that those who believe that "evidence is inherently subjective are wrong [...] [because]



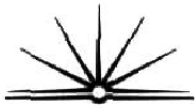
the names, numbers and expressions on the page do not change, no matter who is looking at them". ~~the Windschuttle~~, While Trachtenberg outlines what he saw to be the uselessness of the post-modern approach, Windschuttle seeks to ~~prove~~ in validate the concepts behind the post-modern approach with proactive ~~proof~~.

Vincent makes multiple notable points, ~~the~~ ~~the~~ perhaps most importantly, the subjective nature of history ~~as~~ that stems ~~from~~ from the bias in "survival of evidence".

Windschuttle's response (i.e. the Elton quotation) ignores the bias in ~~on~~ the survival of evidence over time that stems ~~from~~ from the ~~the~~ element of chance (as opposed to human intervention). For example, if a battle occurs between armies, one twice the <sup>size</sup> ~~size~~ of the other, it is irresponsible to assume that evidence from the two sides will be preserved



over time in the same ratio. Geographical and technological factors, along with the human element, a result in changes in evidence over time. Furthermore, when Windschuttle notes that statistics on a written page do not change, he ignores the impact of translation errors. <sup>For example,</sup> A source may record casualties of 1800, which may become 'almost 2000', which may become <sup>at</sup> well under half of another ~~the~~ event being compared, which has 5000 casualties, which may become 'between 1000-2000' etc. Furthermore, statistics are rarely the full extent of a historical investigation; history often attempts to describe events, and this is where the bias of both sources and interpretations occurs. Trachtenberg ~~asks~~ asks: "how can our understanding of the past be anything more than an artifact of our political beliefs" and, if "political beliefs" is expanded to ~~the~~ "entire context", the answer is that it can't. ~~is~~ the post-modern



approach to history is the only reasonable one.

In conclusion, examination of the positions of Vincent, Trachtenberg and Windschuttle has allowed for detailed discussion and evaluation of the debate depicted by Munslow. Essentially, the notion of history being "what happened" was shown to be flawed, and ~~the~~ post-modern perspectives on history validated.